

Disability Working Group

Tuesday, 22nd November, 2022

DISABILITY WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McMullan (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland and Haire.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Ms. S. Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager;
Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Ms. S. McNeill, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Ms. J. Beck, Sign Language Interpreter;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer.

Election of Chairperson for November 2022 – May 2023

It was agreed that Councillor McMullan be appointed as the Chairperson to the Disability Working Group from November, 2022 until the Local Government Elections, scheduled to be held in May 2023.

Apologies

There were no apologies received.

Terms of Reference and Membership

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services introduced the Language Officer who would be supported by the Policy, Research and Compliance Officers. She referred to Councillor McMullan's suggested amendments to the Terms of Reference. Discussion followed in relation to the membership of the Working Group and the Senior Democratic Services Officer provided clarity around membership protocol. A Member raised concerns about the optics of the Working Group in relation to disability and stated that it was often inadequate due to those with disabilities not being represented at meetings and that it was important to sustain engagement in this regard.

The Members agreed that external stakeholders would be invited to every other meeting or when the Working Group considered it necessary.

The Language Officer raised the issue of meeting accessibility and informed the Working Group that remote meetings were not accessible or suitable for those with certain disabilities.

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services stated that she appreciated there was much to consider. A Member highlighted the importance of Elected Member engagement in order to engage external groups and individuals.

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services referred to the work that the Language Officer had undertaken in relation to the International Day for People with Disabilities event. She advised the Members that there would be a Q and A session at the end of the event which could be used to understand what is and isn't working from a disability perspective.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that in relation to the suggestion of outside bodies on the membership, the Members give this consideration in order to reach a consensus and an update would be given at the next meeting. He confirmed that Party Leaders had been contacted seeking nominations on the membership of the Working Group and this would be followed up.

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services referred to the wording in the Terms of Reference relating to the Disability Strategy and the paragraph suggested by Councillor McMullan. She suggested inviting the Director of City and Organisational Strategy and representatives from Place and Economy to inform the Working Group about what was already going on in the organisation which would in turn inform the Working Group's Terms of Reference. She further advised that there was a broader piece of work that she would like the Working Group to hear about in relation to how disability was being addressed in strategic policies, however, she was conscious of resource and handling expectations.

One Member acknowledged the work that the Language Officer had delivered. In relation to organisational strategy on disability, the Member welcomed Belfast Agenda engagement. Another Member stated that it was important to see what was already being undertaken in the organisation to avoid duplication.

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services referred to the draft Terms of Reference at appendix 3 and proposed shortening the second bullet point to 'to support the development of a new Council Disability Strategy' which was accepted by the Group. She proposed that a question relating to engagement be asked at the event on 5th December which would help to inform membership.

It was agreed that the Working Group would meet again in January at which point it would be decided on how often the Working Group would meet going forward.

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services advised that she would undertake horizon scanning with the Chairperson and the Governance and Compliance Manager in advance of the next meeting.

International Day for People with Disabilities event

The Language Officer provided the Members with details about the event which would take place on 5th December at the City Hall. The theme for this event was 'Employability for Everyone' which would focus on building an accessible and inclusive world for persons with disabilities working in Belfast.

The programme for this event would include keynote speeches from Sean Fitzsimons, disability advocate and the Project Lead for the Harkin Summit in Belfast

earlier this year and Edyth Dunlop from NI Union for Supported Employment. There would be a Question and Answer session with Sean, Edyth and Catherine Christy, HR Manager.

The Language Officer added that he hoped that the Members could attend the event.

Noted.

Pavement cafés (this was an issue raised by Member at Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in October 2022)

It was noted that an invitation to the Working Group had not been extended to the Deputy Lord Mayor which had been an oversight. The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services advised that she would speak to the Deputy Lord Mayor in relation to the matter raised.

Noted.

The Chairperson thanked the Officers for forming the Working Group and for their contribution.

Chairperson